

Disability Awareness Month

STATE AGENCIES CELEBRATE DISABILITY AWARENESS MONTH

As a state agency, you can take a leadership role and help remind others of the importance of Disability Awareness Month in March, by making campaign materials available to your staff and constituents or by planning specific events. The Indiana Governor's Planning Council for People with Disabilities can assist you by providing free instructional materials, which include tips and checklists for organizing events that will raise awareness and understanding of disability issues in your agency.

The Council also encourages you, as a state agency, to partner with other field offices, state agencies and government organizations. By collaborating, more events can be planned and more information can be shared. The free resources available from the Council can be given to other state agencies, your constituents and field offices.

INCREASE AWARENESS OF THE ADA AND DISABILITY ISSUES

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) guarantees and protects the rights of people with disabilities as American citizens and makes discrimination based on a person's disability illegal. Its passage by Congress and signing by the President on July 26, 1990 signifies an awareness that people with disabilities deserve the same rights of citizenship as people without disabilities.

The ADA protects the rights of some 54 million Americans who have a physical or mental disability. This number will continue to grow as our nation's elderly population increases.

There are many ways to increase awareness about the ADA and disability issues within your agency. These activities include:

1. Convene a group that includes the agency ADA coordinator to review agency materials and public spaces. Consider these questions:
 - Are agency materials available in alternative formats?
 - Do agency staff who answer phones have access to a TT?

- Does agency staff know how to respond to relay calls from citizens with hearing impairments?
 - Are the agency's public rooms and building entrances accessible?
2. Organize a training event on disability issues and policy for human resource professionals.
 3. Encourage your agency supervisors to share information on disability issues during staff meetings.
 4. Include an article about Disability Awareness Month and a print PSA (black-and-white version of the 2003 Disability Awareness Month artwork) in your agency newsletter.
 5. Insert a 2003 Disability Awareness Month bookmark with each employee's paycheck during the month of March.
 6. Display 2003 Disability Awareness Month posters in your office.
 7. Inform the agencies and organizations with which you work about Disability Awareness Month, and encourage them to participate.
 8. Declare a day in March as Disability Awareness Day in your agency. Increase awareness and understanding of disability issues among your staff by inviting disability service providers and advocacy groups to provide your office with important information.
 9. Invite a guest speaker to your office to present a disability-related topic to your staff.

These are just a few suggestions for activities you can plan in your agency during the month of March in recognition of Disability Awareness Month. Other planning packets on a variety of topics are available from the Indiana Governor's Planning Council for People with Disabilities. You can adapt one of these packets to plan your own agency event.

Packet topics include:

- Special Event – Speaker
- Awareness Day
- Bank Receipts/Postal Indicia Campaigns
- Increasing Awareness Through Your Business
- Recognition Awards

For more information, contact the Governor's Planning Council at (317) 232-7770 (voice), (317) 232-7771 (TT), (317) 233-3712 (fax), GPCPD@gpcpd.org (e-mail) or visit the Council's Web site at www.state.in.us/GPCPD.